

Delta Kappa Educational Society, and the American Association of School Administrators. Mrs. Klink's long list of publicized articles and also her guest presentations at the University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, Miami University, and Mt. St. Joseph College showcase her commitment to educational success.

Mrs. Klink, I offer my congratulations and gratitude for your long and successful career in the field of education. I wish you well in your future endeavors, and I hope you continue to achieve happiness and success wherever your life journey chooses to lead you throughout your retirement.

RESTORING AN OBLIGATION OF CITIZENSHIP

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw our attention to the most important obligation of citizens in a democracy and to illuminate the discomfort of many Americans to the elimination of that obligation. I speak about the right to vote—the cornerstone of every democratic system of government, particularly ours.

Democracies are based on the principle that their citizens participate actively in the decision-making processes of the government. Whether in small communities or throughout the vast expanse of the Nation, citizens cast ballots to express their preferences and choices for the direction of the country and to determine the policies and leaders that will be implemented throughout the Nation. The voice of each and every citizen is expressed equally through their ballot and their ability to cast a ballot. Generations of Americans have fought and died to guarantee that all Americans share in this right and obligation.

Unfortunately, today we still face the predicament that millions of American citizens are denied their right to vote. They are denied the ability to influence policy, policymakers, political leaders, and the direction of the country that they belong to. Millions of American citizens who have been convicted of crimes in the past are denied the ability to cast ballots in elections. Regardless of the nature of their crime or any rehabilitation that may have occurred, these ex-felons cannot participate in the decision-making process of this great Nation.

Though they have served their time, fulfilled their sentence, and paid back their debt to society, millions of ex-felons continue to be punished for their past criminal records. Those who turned a corner in their life and fled the criminal path can never again fulfill the most important obligation of citizenship—voting. They remain on the outside looking in at our political system. They want, they deserve, the right to be re-integrated as full citizens into our system. Yet, the system stands firmly in their way, stripping them of their right to vote.

I bring this issue to the attention of the House of Representatives with the hope that this Congress will take the important steps of fulfilling the promises of democracy. I hope

that the House of Representatives would take action to restore the right to vote to American ex-felons. They have paid their debts to society and we should permit their participation in our democratic process. Too many Americans fought and died for this right to vote and too many today are denied the ability to exercise their rights.

I submit for the RECORD a Carib News article providing further evidence and argument for our consideration. Progress is being made on the restoration of rights to ex-felons, but immediate action is needed by this Congress.

[July 5, 2005]

PROGRESS IN RESTORING FELONS' RIGHT TO VOTE

Following victory in Iowa, where the Governor recently announced that he would reverse his state's lifetime ban on felon voting, advocates for restoring felons' right to vote expressed optimism that progress was being made in rolling back laws that disproportionately affect blacks and other minorities.

According to Catherine Weiss, a lawyer with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, felony disenfranchisement laws represent the last vestiges of Jim Crow that disenfranchise African Americans. As of 2000, almost 5 million Americans couldn't vote because of laws that restrict those convicted of a felony from casting ballots; four in 10 of those disenfranchised were black.

The full 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York is also expected to hear arguments in cases brought by two prisoners who claim that the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which removed barriers to black voters, should be used to argue that the felony laws are unfair. Forty-eight states restrict voting rights for felons while they are behind bars or serving parole or probation. Four states—Alabama, Florida, Kentucky, and Virginia—ban voting for life on the grounds that such restrictions are justified. In 2001, New Mexico lifted a lifetime ban, and Nebraska followed suit in March. In several states, felons can now apply to have their voting rights restored.

The issue of disenfranchisement escalated in Florida after the 2000 presidential election, which was decided by fewer than 600 votes there. With more than 820,000 felons who could not vote as of 2000, Florida is said to have the largest disenfranchised population of any state.

One driving force behind efforts to roll back disenfranchisement laws is the nation's swelling prison population. Though crime rates have fallen the prison population soared to 2.1 million by June 2004, according to figures compiled by the Justice Department. In 1970, that number was about 200,000.

According to Theodore M. Shaw, president of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, who will present arguments in the New York cases, "As the numbers of prisoners have grown, more awareness of the injustice of it has also grown."

With 13 percent of all black men barred from voting because of disenfranchisement laws, advocates contend that many have become disengaged since felons also face prohibitions in other areas of life, such as living in public housing, obtaining identification cards, and getting student loans.

On June 22, in the shadow of the U.S. Federal Courthouse in Foley Square, standing before the African Burial Ground Memorial Sculpture, New Yorkers representing persons who have a felony conviction stood in silent protest to demand the full restoration of voting rights to the formerly incarcerated.

In recognition of a historic en banc hearing in the cases of Hayden v. Pataki and

Muntaqim v. Coombe, the silent protest was conducted as the Nation recognized the 40th anniversary of the passage and President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The landmark legislation extended voting rights confirmed in the 15th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution to disenfranchised blacks in southern states. The Act has since been reauthorized and its protections extended to language minorities and northern jurisdictions with a history of vote dilution, voter intimidation, and discriminatory polling practices.

The silent protest was staged to symbolically represent citizens, who for no other reason than having been incarcerated for felony offenses have been denied their voting rights while still being expected to fulfill all other obligations of citizenship, including paying taxes.

THANKING MR. RICK CHESSER

HON. E. CLAY SHAW, JR.

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 12, 2005

Mr. SHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank Mr. Rick Chesser for his 35 years of support and dedication to the State of Florida as an employee of the Florida Department of Transportation. Rick has decided to retire from public services, yet at the time of his departure, he was the longest serving District Secretary with 17 years of service to District 4, which encompasses Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, St. Lucie, and Indian River counties.

Throughout his 17 years with the Florida Department of Transportation, Rick has compiled a lasting legacy. Under his watch, the district received much needed funding and he opened constructive dialogue between the district, the public and local elected officials. It should also be highlighted that within District 4, Rick allocated numerous hours to ensure mobility of constituents while simultaneously keeping the best results for the environment and quality of life at heart.

In particular, Rick's commitment to South Florida's public transportation system was never more evident when he served as project director for Interstate 595. Through this project, the Port Everglades Expressway was created, Interstate 75 was constructed, and Interstate 95 was widened in two of the five counties within his district. From there, funding was received for a tri-county rail system providing even greater accessibility for South Florida commuters.

As construction progressed with these numerous projects, Rick ensured the attractiveness of the land by providing District 4 the highest level of amenities in the state for landscaping, paver blocks, and decorative lighting. He also worked with individual cities to assist them in development plans that would shift with population growth.

Mr. Speaker, Rick Chesser's work for the State of Florida and that of District 4 will not be forgotten. Rick has made great strides in the development of various areas to raise the morale and the quality of life for all residents. We are indebted to him and to his service for the past 35 years. My staff and I wish him all the best in his retirement.